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Waiting

Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, about a month ago stated he would not hesitate to recruit journalists as agents if he felt it was in the national interest.

Turner, at a gathering of the nation's newspaper editors in Washington, went so far as to describe the editors as "naive" if they believed foreign governments would look upon our reporters as above reproach. He suggested journalists should consider it an honor to be asked to serve their country.

Our cloak-and-dagger director obviously has no grasp of the role of the press. It is because the press is under the influence of government in so many parts of the world that our own journalists are suspect when they go abroad.

Our reporters abroad don't need Turner saying some of them may be on the CIA payroll. The credibility of the press is at stake, here and abroad, and Turner's statement could put reporters' lives in danger. Even more, what doesn't sit well here is that our president, who should have a firmer grasp of history and the Constitution which precludes a government press, agreed with Turner.

George Bush, now challenging Ronald Reagan for the GOP presidential nomination, was the CIA chief in 1976. He announced the agency would no longer enter into paid relationships with accredited members of the press. We presume Bush hasn't changed his opinion.

We hope Reagan and Sen. Kennedy would find a CIA-influenced press as repulsive as it sounds.

The leaders of the American Society of Newspaper Editors asked Carter to reconsider his stand. They asked for a meeting, if necessary, to express their concern and to discuss the ramifications of Turner's policies.

The White House acknowledged receipt of the letter by the president, but there was no response.

Mr. President, we are still waiting.